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Suspect Who Fled to Serbia Pleads Guilty in 2008 Beating

By James Barron

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A former college basketball player pleaded guilty in Belgrade, Serbia, on Monday as part of a deal that would send him to prison for his role in a barroom brawl in Binghamton, N.Y., that left a classmate badly injured, the classmate's lawyers said.

The former basketball player, Miladin Kovacevic, 23, was to have gone on trial two weeks ago. But the proceeding was halted in expectation of a guilty plea.

Mr. Kovacevic was accused of beating Bryan Steinhauer of Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, in 2008. Mr. Steinhauer spent months in a coma and had to relearn how to speak and walk.

One of Mr. Steinhauer's lawyers, Irwin Rochman, said the plea agreement called for Mr. Kovacevic to receive a sentence of two years and three months.

"The family would have strongly preferred a longer sentence," Mr. Rochman said. "What the Serbian prosecutors have told us is this sentence is within the range of what Kovacevic would have received if he had gone to trial and been convicted. Given the seriousness of Bryan's injuries, the family's view is the sentence is far too lenient."

Mr. Rochman said the court in Belgrade still must accept the plea. The Associated Press reported that the court indicated that it would mail its final ruling to Mr. Kovacevic.

Mr. Rochman said the agreement also called for Mr. Kovacevic to testify against two Serbian diplomats who helped him leave the United States several weeks after the episode.

Mr. Kovacevic had been charged with assault in Binghamton but jumped bail after one of the diplomats helped post it for him. American officials said at the time that the same diplomat, Igor Milosevic, provided the travel documents that Mr. Kovacevic showed as he boarded a flight at Newark Liberty International Airport on his way to Serbia.